

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



NEWS RELEASE

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Government Reform Committee to Review Government's Continuity of Operations Planning

*GAO Tells Chairman Davis: Not One Major Federal Agency Has Shown It
Has a Comprehensive Plan for Continuing Operations in an Emergency*

Washington, D.C. – Tom Davis (R-VA), chairman of the House Committee on Government Reform, announced today that he will hold an oversight hearing to review a GAO report that found not one of the major federal agencies or departments has a complete Continuity of Operations (COOP) plan.

The report from the General Accounting Office, conducted at the request of Chairman Davis and released today, paints a disturbing picture of a federal government that may not be able to remain fully functional in the event of a severe natural disaster, terrorist attack or other emergency.

Under Presidential Decision Directive 67, issued in October 1998, federal agencies are required to have plans to ensure the continuity of services in emergency situations. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is designated as the agency responsible for issuing guidance and reviewing agencies' plans. The GAO report is critical of the quality of FEMA's oversight.

"I am very concerned that, in the year 2004, the federal government still has major shortcomings in identifying agencies' essential functions and developing plans to carry those functions out in the event of a natural or man-made disaster," Chairman Davis said. "In the last few years in Washington we have seen enough events, both big and small, interrupt government operations to know the importance of continuity of operations plans."

Chairman Davis announced that the Government Reform Committee intends to hold a hearing after the April Recess to review the government's Continuity of Operations program.

At a minimum, COOP plans should identify: the agency's essential functions, plans and procedures for carrying out those functions, order of succession to fill key positions in an emergency, delegations of authority (including legal basis for officials to make decisions in emergencies), alternate facilities to support operations, redundant emergency communications, and vital records. In addition, tests, training and exercises should occur regularly.

Twenty of the 23 largest civilian departments and agencies surveyed by the GAO had developed and documented some elements of a COOP plan. But the report found that "none of the agencies provided documentation sufficient to show that they were following all the guidance" of Federal Preparedness Circular 65, which provides the elements of a viable COOP capability.

The General Accounting Office report also determined that "the lack of compliance shown by many COOP plans can be largely attributed to FEMA's limited guidance and oversight of executive branch COOP planning."

Copies of the report will be available on the GAO's Web site (<http://www.gao.gov/>) this afternoon.

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